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SUBJECT: CODEL SIRES SUPPORTS CZECH EFFORTS IN CUBA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: CODEL Sires met with Czech government and NGO officials during a visit to Prague August 27-28. CODEL consisted of Congressman Albio Sires (D-NJ), Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), and Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL). CODEL stressed U.S. appreciation of Czech leadership within the EU maintaining the spotlight on human rights in Cuba. The Congressmen emphasized the need to continue providing support for Cuban political prisoners and the internal opposition and sought Czech ideas on ways to enhance collaboration between our two countries. End Summary.

Czech FM Schwarzenberg

¶2. (SBU) Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, accompanied by Czech Ambassadors Kolar (US), Palous (UN), and Koselt (Cuba), warmly welcomed CODEL. CODEL members offered thanks for the Czechs' active engagement in support of democracy and human rights in Cuba, and for the generally strong U.S.-Czech partnership. They praised Czech-led efforts within the EU, and also the Czech role in bringing together like-minded members of the EU and elsewhere to support opposition efforts in Cuba. They encouraged expanded Czech efforts in this regard, and expressed hope that a "Friends of Democratic Cuba" effort would be expanded to other regions, including Latin America. Schwarzenberg pledged to continue Czech efforts.

¶3. (SBU) On future EU efforts, Schwarzenberg termed the coming year critical. He thought that if there was not any improvement on the island by the time next June's review of the EU Common Position comes around, it would be clear that the Spanish policy of engagement was not working. Schwarzenberg pressed for a policy that permitted interaction with everyday Czechs, noting the important benefit that dissidents in communist Czechoslovakia derived from contact with Westerners. He also stressed the importance of providing literature and other information in Spanish, so that dissidents had accessible access to outside views.

¶4. (SBU) CODEL members explained current U.S. policy in support of dissidents, but also withholding large-scale American tourism (which would bring huge economic benefits) until there were concrete improvements on the island. They also discussed the benefit of calling international attention to the plight of political prisoners.

Czech Parliamentarians

¶5. (SBU) The CODEL focused on the issue of Cuba during meetings with the leadership of the Czech Senators and members of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee. They praised Czech parliamentarians, noting their visits to meet with members of the Cuban opposition and political prisoners serve notice to the Cuban government that the international

community will not overlook human rights complaints while also serving as a beacon of hope for the Cuban people. The Czech parliamentarians inquired about exposing the Cuban population to U.S. democratic principles through lifting the restriction on U.S. travel to Cuba. Both sides raised the issue of the future transition within the Cuban government, and First Vice-President of the Senate, Senator Petr Pithart, provided the delegation with an article he had written on the difficulties surrounding a transition from Communism, entitled "Taking Over the Power."

Czech NGO - People in Need

16. (SBU) The Czech NGO "People in Need" provided an overview for CODEL Sires of their work in Cuba as well as within Europe to publicize the situation in Cuba. Within Cuba their work is primarily focused on assisting the underground dissident movement (particularly political prisoners and journalists) and exposing the misuse of political power. They provide direct assistance to political prisoners and their families - such as medical equipment, books and requested documents. For Cuban journalists, they provide this same assistance, as well as linking Cuban journalists with European media outlets. They have found that journalists registered as European correspondents are less frequently harassed by the Cuban government. Within Europe "People in Need" host public celebrations of key Cuban dissident anniversaries and they have a European website with information on Cuba. As well, they network closely with fifteen other European NGOs on Cuban issues.

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